DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 356 364 CE 063 444

TITLE	Open College Networks: Participation and Progression.
INSTITUTION	Further Education Unit, London (England).
REPORT NO	ISBN-1-85338-296-5
PUB DATE	Feb 93
NOTE	9p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research/Technical (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Academic Achievement; Access to Education; Adult Education; Adult Students; *Credits; Educational Research; Foreign Countries; *Nontraditional Education; *Open Universities; Postsecondary Education; Program Effectiveness; *Student Motivation; Student Recruitment
IDENTIFIERS	Great Britain; *Open College Networks (Great Britain)

ABSTRACT

A research project assessed the effect of Open College Network (OCN) accreditation on learner motivation and progression. It reviewed the effectiveness of OCNs in reaching the learners they seek to target--those who have benefited least from existing initial and continuing education. A postal survey was conducted of all learners registered with the London Open College Federation (OCF) and a sample of those registered with the Manchester OCF; responses were received from 1,741 learners. Information from database records provided by both OCNs was analyzed to provide a profile of learners and to determine their progression within the OCN. Findings were as follows: (1) respondents included a high proportion of learners from those groups traditionally underrepresented in education and training; (2) learners placed a high value on credits, but needed to be introduced with sensitivity to the idea of accreditation; (3) learners joined courses for a range of personal, social, educational, and vocational motives; (4) during the course of that learning program, learners' confidence was boosted, and their ambitions and expectations were raised; (5) most, including many who had no original ambition to progress, went on to further learning; (6) of the minority who did not start another course, family commitments was the most common reason; and (7) most associated credits with enhanced value, higher quality, and increased recognition by others. (YLB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED356364

OPEN COLLEGE NETWORKS:
PARTICIPATION AND PROGRESSION

February 1993

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

FOREWORD

During the last decade there has been a growing concern to improve access to education to those who have benefited least from it.

Open College Networks (OCNs) were created to open access routes for such learners, by awarding credit for learning outside the traditional qualification systems, formalising progression routes and improving the quality of learning programmes. By 1992, 900 organisations were members of OCNs, including 370 institutions of further and higher education, while annual registrations of learners had reached 25,000. The National Open College Network (NOCN) had already been established and by 1992 had nine members subscribing to a common framework of accreditation processes and quality assurance, with 11 associates preparing to join.

In 1991, the Unit for the Development of Adult Continuing Education (UDACE), which had been supporting OCN development, with encouragement from the Departments of Education and Science and Employment, decided to undertake a modest research project on OCNs. The project sought to explore two things: how far OCNs were actually achieving their objectives, and what effect they actually had on learners; and secondly, what could be learned about adult learners and progression from records of OCNs. These provide a unique and large-scale source of information from a wide range of providers in the post-school sector on the learning careers of individuals, as they move between institutions and sectors over a number of years. OCNs proved to be a rich source of information about very diverse groups of learners.

The result is a significant contribution to our knowledge about adult learners and learning, and builds upon and is consistent with recent work by Veronica McGiveney (*Tracking Adult Learning Routes*, NIACE 1992) and Keith Percy and Peter Ward (*The Progression of Unemployed Adults in Three Open Colleges*, FEU, 1991, unpublished). The findings also point to the need for further work to refine the questions and method, and improve the recording systems of OCNs so that such work can be done more rapidly and effectively in the future. Since no control group could be constructed, it tells us what learners do and say about OCN systems, but does not tell us whether other kinds of adult learner would say different things. Despite much common ground between the two OCNs studied (in London and Manchester), OCNs are relatively new, and each has a distinct history: it would be dangerous to assume that identical results would be found in South Yorkshire or Surrey.

However, some key points are clear: learners achieving credit through OCNs do come from those groups frequently under-represented in education, and for many the OCN-accredited course is their first experience of formal education since leaving school. They say that the award of credit matters to them, increasing their confidence and motivation. Over 70% progressed to a further course (within or without an OCN) or continued on their present one.

The evidence in this study suggests that OCNs do have an effect on adult access and progression and there are further questions to ask as OCNs develop rapidly. We hope that this summary of the report will encourage further development in OCNs and in credit accumulation and transfer, increase understanding of OCNs among institutions considering joining or forming new OCNs, and will prompt researchers to ask new questions about adult learning and our knowledge of it.

This research also provides FEU with encouraging evidence to support the rationale for a national framework for credit accumulation and transfer as a means of enhancing learner motivation and widening participation. While this research relates to a credit system which operates primarily outside national awards and qualifications, it provides an insight into the benefits which could be gained through a national credit framework embracing all post-16 education and training.

Stephen McNair

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

N McGoff

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CE 063

INTRODUCTION

This bulletin summarises the results of a research project commissioned by the Unit for the Development of Adult Continuing Education (UDACE) and carried out by Dr Steve Wisher and his team at the Survey Information and Analysis Unit of Sheffield City Polytechnic (now Sheffield Hallam University). The full report is available from FEU.

The purpose of the research was to assess the effect of OCN accreditation on learner motivation and progression and to review the effectiveness of OCNs in reaching the learners they seek to target — those who have benefited least from existing initial and continuing education. The research explores both the motives of learners, their aims and ambitions, and their progression, in order to begin to map the relationships between achievements, motivations and aspirations.

Open College Networks

The rationale underpinning the work of OCNs is that many adults, particularly those who lack confidence in educational settings and lack formal qualifications, often join local informal provision as a first step back into education and training. Since this learning rarely leads to formal qualifications and the level and volume of that learning is unknown, it is difficult for learners to use it as an effective basis for progression. By providing a flexible accreditation system which allows local and targeted programmes to offer formal recognition, OCNs aim to enhance the progression opportunities for these learners. It is important to stress that this is not at the expense of targeting. The OCN-accreditation system focuses clearly on the target group as essential in judging the appropriateness and quality of a learning programme.

Through the OCN-accreditation process, learning programmes are recognised by the OCN, learners' achievements are verified and credits awarded to learners on those programmes. Credits are a currency denoting the volume of learning and are awarded to learners at four different levels: in broad terms, OCN level 1 covers the development of basic skills concepts and practical activities; level 2 covers consolidation and wider application and is broadly equivalent to NVQ I; level 3 is an equivalent to GCSE; level 4 is an equivalent to A level.

The levels provide a framework for learners to progress, and are a means of locating different programmes in relation to each other and in relation to national qualifications and awards. The aim of OCNs is to make progression easier for learners, not only within the OCN framework of levels, but on to programmes leading to national qualifications and awards, where these are appropriate. The flexibility of a credit-based accreditation system means that learners can accumulate credits over time at their own pace, and use them as evidence of the level of learning achieved and quality of the learning experience, as the basis for progression.

Although levels offer a simple device for identifying where progression takes place, nonetheless a central issue which was highlighted during the project was the difficulty of defining learner progression. Adult learners may not necessarily progress upwards through the levels, but often choose to broaden their learning at a particular level. Thus, learners often follow complex patterns within OCN levels with credits being gained at the same level, but at different times and in different areas of study. Nonetheless, this can be seen as accumulation of appropriate experience and represents progression for the individuals concerned.

Current developments in OCNs

While OCNs have been established to meet different priorities and under different funding arrangements, there has been a convergence of their operations over recent years, expressed through the formalisation of the NOCN. This links OCNs across England and Wales. Its constitution encompasses an accreditation framework which all its members must operate; it is monitored by link arrangements between all OCNs to ensure its consistent application. While OCNs may be established with various priorities — e.g. bridging the gap between community provision and college-based education — all OCNs accredit learning programmes which are delivered in different sectors (community, voluntary, adult, FE, employer-based) and at all four OCN levels.

Research method

The research was carried out, surveying learners registered on OCN-accredited programmes, between 1 September 1990 and 31 August 1991 in two ways:

- analysis of records in the databases of the two OCNs;
- undertaking a survey of learners which was designed to answer the following questions:
  - — What previous qualifications did learners have?
  - — Did they value accreditation?
  - — How did accreditation affect their perceptions of the programme?
  - — Where had they progressed to since completion of the OCN-accredited programme?
  - — What were their short- and long-term educational ambitions?

The project aimed to explore these aspects in relation to the different sectors of education and training involved with OCNs and to monitor the participation rates of those groups which are traditionally under-represented in education.

Two OCNs were selected to form the basis for the research. Manchester Open College Federation (MOCF), the longest established OCN, was able to provide extensive records of learners spanning nine academic years. The London Open College Federation (LOCF) was more recently established, having accredited learning programmes for just two years, so the learners surveyed were from the first full year of operation of the London Open College Federation.

Both OCNs provided database records of learners registered between 1 September 1990 and 31 August 1991. The information gave the details necessary to carry out the two major strands of the research — postal survey of learners and analysis of the learners' database records.

Postal survey

A postal survey was conducted of all learners registered with the London Open College Federation, and a sample of those registered with the Manchester Open College Federation (which has a larger database). In total, 1,741 responses were received from learners, 935 from Manchester and 806 from London.

Database analysis

Information from the databases was analysed to provide both a profile of learners and to determine their progression within the OCNs. Specifically, details of the number of learners who had undertaken more than one learning programme were identified in Manchester to establish their progress through OCN levels.

FINDINGS FROM THE SURVEY

Although members of the NOCN share a set of agreed principles and ways of operating, they have very different origins. Since the movement is relatively young it may be unwise to assume that those recruited to OCN-recognised programmes are alike in background or motivation.

MOCF and LOCF serve different populations in different cities, and have distinct histories. In Manchester, the OCN has strong roots in Adult Basic Education, from which it has grown to embrace the full range of OCN levels. The profile of recognised programmes reflects this, and it is inevitably reflected in the data on motivation and progression. Since 1978, London has been a pioneer in the development of Access to HE courses, especially for disadvantaged and excluded groups. This historical development is reflected in the greater proportion of work in this area, but the push for a broader base for the accreditation of the wider adult curriculum came at a later date, in 1989 with the launch of LOCF.

For this reason the report tries to avoid combining the figures since this might have presented a misleading profile. However, the similarity of responses to some of the key questions remains notable, and suggests that there is common experience, despite the differences between OCNs and areas. Given that no control group was identified for the project, it is not possible to disentangle which findings are exclusively attributable to OCN accreditation and which are the result of particular local and historical factors. OCNs are part of the post-school sector, not separate from it and therefore the results may reflect a range of factors.

1. Who are OCN learners?

In general, take up of post-school education is highest among those who have already benefited most from education, and who already have some formal qualifications. The National Training Task Force has proposed to raise the qualifications of the adult population by setting National Education and Training Targets of 50% of the work-force qualified to at least NVQ III by the year 2000. The respondents to the survey include a high proportion of learners with qualifications below this level, and for half of those respondents without formal qualifications, the OCN-accredited learning programme was their first experience of formal post-school education or training.

Respondents included a high proportion of learners from those groups which are traditionally under-represented in education and training:

By seeking information on ethnicity, gender, social class, age and previous educational qualifications, the survey provides a profile of participants on OCN-accredited programmes.

Respondents included a high proportion of women and disabled people:

- 69% of respondents in London, and 82% in Manchester were women;
- 6% of respondents in London and 16% in Manchester were disabled.

A high proportion of respondents were black:

31% of respondents from London and 10% of respondents from Manchester were from ethnic minority backgrounds (these figures exclude the three per cent of respondents from 'other ethnic group').

As a comparison, statistics from the 1991 census indicate that the populations from ethnic minority groups in Inner London, Outer London and Manchester are 25.6%, 16.9% and 5.9% respectively (OPCS, 1992).

	Percentages	
Ethnicity	London	Manchester
White	63	88
Black-Caribbean	15	3
Black-African	9	1
Black-Other	4	2
Indian	2	2
Pakistani	—	1
Bangladeshi	1	—
Chinese	—	1
Other ethnic group	6	2

A high proportion of respondents were unemployed and seeking work:

19% of respondents were currently unemployed and seeking work (registered or not), but unemployment was probably higher at the time of study since eight per cent of total respondents started work after completing the learning programme.

Employment status	Percentages London	Manchester
Employed full-time	13	22
Employed part-time	14	18
Registered unemployed	14	15
Looking for a job but not registered unemployed	5	5
Unwaged and not seeking work	14	19
In full-time education	31	18
In part-time education	22	16
Retired	1	3

A high proportion of respondents were from social classes C1, D and E:

Analysis of the social class of those in employment (27% of total respondents in London, 40% in Manchester), indicates:

- below average participation from the middle and upper classes and from the skilled working classes;
- above average participation of supervisory or clerical, semi and unskilled workers and casual workers.

Social class of those in employment	Percentages London	Manchester	GB*
A — Upper middle class	4	3	6
B — Middle class	4	4	19
C1 — Supervisory or clerical	45	28	21
C2 — Skilled working class	7	11	30
D — Semi and unskilled manual workers	23	22	17
E — State pensioners, widows (with no other earner) and casual workers	17	32	6

* The categories are those used in the *General Household Survey*, enabling comparative national figures to be presented in the last column (HMSO, 1992)

A high proportion of respondents were aged between 25 and 44:

- 61% of respondents in London and 55% in Manchester were aged between 25 and 44;
- 39% in London and 52% in Manchester were aged 35 and over.

Age	Percentages London	Manchester
Under 18	3	5
18–24	19	12
25–34	39	31
35–44	23	24
45–54	7	12
55–64	6	9
65 and over	3	7

Respondents generally held no or low-level qualifications:

- 22% of respondents in London and 40% in Manchester have no qualifications;
- 69% of respondents in London and 79% in Manchester have qualifications lower than NVQ level III.

When analysed by *highest qualification* achieved, the following profile is revealed:

- 42% have CSE/GCSE/BTEC General;
- 12% have A level/BTEC National;
- 1% have HND;
- 9% in London and 5% in Manchester have degrees.

Respondents were also asked whether they had been on learning programmes, such as first aid, swimming, pottery, or in-house training during employment. In total, 68% of respondents indicated they had undertaken such learning programmes, with the majority of these falling into the areas of:

- art, craft and design;
- clerical, business and office practice;
- first aid, swimming and fitness;
- self-development, including counselling and assertiveness training;
- languages;
- nursing and childcare.

Those who lacked any formal qualifications also tended not to have participated in the above types of learning programme, whereas 75% of those with formal qualifications had also been on other learning programmes; this was the case for only 53% of those lacking any formal qualifications.

2. Do credits matter to learners?

OCNs attach importance to giving recognition for achievement — 'credit where it's due' — on the grounds that this helps to increase motivation, build confidence and provides the basis for progression. However, there is debate about whether adult learners are interested in formal accreditation for their learning, whether this can be off-putting, or whether they are only interested in nationally recognised awards. The results of the survey show that some learners felt that because they could get credits for it, the course must be more difficult (12% in London and 9% in Manchester), or might mean more exams (5% in London and 4% in Manchester).

Significant numbers of learners, however, felt that it increased the value of the learning in some way:

London	Manchester	Effect
55%	49%	Felt course was of more value to me
35%	30%	Made me think of going onto other courses
41%	28%	Felt course was of higher quality
49%	37%	Made me think course was more likely to be recognised by others

While these responses demonstrate that learners place a high value on accreditation, they also support the concern of OCNs that learners should be introduced with sensitivity to the idea of accreditation. The normal practice of OCNs enables tutors to decide when the possibility of receiving credits should be explained. Often this is some weeks into the course when learners have already satisfied assessment requirements for some credits.

3. Why did learners join their learning programmes?

It is sometimes claimed that adult learners can be divided into two broad, and distinct, categories: those seeking formal qualifications and those engaged in 'leisure' learning, whose motivation is based on personal interest and self-development and social reasons. The data shows that the latter are the main reasons for about half of those enrolling for joining an OCN-accredited learning programme — 44% of respondents in London and 60% in Manchester.

However, a significant group joined for employment reasons (11% in London and 14% in Manchester), and the largest single group of respondents said that the main reason for choosing the learning programme was to help them go on to do other learning programmes.

	Percentages	
Reason given	**London**	**Manchester**
To help you go on to other courses	42	22
Personal interest	21	27
Social reasons	2	2
To develop yourself	21	31
To help you get a job	8	9
To help you in your current job	3	5
Some other reason	3	4

Progression matters more to black respondents:

- 41% of black respondents chose the course to go on to further courses, only 29% of white respondents gave this as the main reason;
- 27% of white respondents chose to do the OCN-accredited course to develop themselves, compared with 23% of black respondents.

Of those who chose the course to go on to further courses, there is a steady decrease with age, from 43% of respondents aged 18–24, 39% of 25–34 year olds and 22% of respondents aged over 35. On the other hand, the proportion of respondents choosing a course for personal interest or personal development increases with age, from 17% of 18–24 year olds to 31% of respondents aged 35 and over. Those respondents in social class C1 were more likely to have chosen their course for personal interest — 40% of C1s, 18% of Ds and 22% of Es said this.

The motivation of respondents to progress to other courses increased with the OCN level:

When the information is analysed according to the levels of the credits achieved by the learner the following patterns emerge:

- those who choose the course to go on to other courses increase steadily from level 1 (22% in London and 4% in Manchester), through levels 2 and 3 to level 4 (60% in London and 54% in Manchester);
- those choosing the course to develop themselves decrease steadily from level 1 (33% in London and 54% in Manchester), through levels 2 and 3 to level 4 (16% in London and 24% in Manchester).

	London				Manchester			
Level	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Reason given								
To help you go on to other courses	22	23	30	60	4	11	19	54
Personal interest	11	30	30	13	21	31	33	13
Social reasons	22	3	2	1	5	4	2	1
To develop yourself	33	34	21	16	54	34	26	24
To help you get a job	—	5	9	5	5	10	12	4
To help you in your current job	—	1	4	3	6	6	4	1
Some other reason	11	3	3	4	4	5	3	5

Learner motivation on joining programmes is therefore a mixture of personal/social/self development, vocational and educational progression, the latter being most notable among black people, young people and people from the higher social classes. The following sections explore the way these ambitions have developed by the time they have finished these programmes.

4. What do OCN credits achieve?

OCNs consider award of credit an important means of raising the self esteem of learners, particularly when many recruits to OCN-accredited courses have no previous qualifications. If learners begin to perceive themselves as successful, their self-confidence and their ambitions will be raised. The findings of the survey support this.

The vast majority of respondents thought that receiving credits was important. This was particularly so for black respondents:

- 79% of the respondents who knew they would get OCN credits when they joined the learning programme, indicated that this was either fairly or very important;
- 92% of black respondents thought that credits were fairly or very important.

'I enjoyed the course and it was nice to receive some recognition of achievement at the end. I hope to take more credits and courses in the future.'

The majority of respondents said that OCN credits helped to boost their confidence and heighten their ambitions:

- 77% said that OCN credits helped to build their confidence;
- 57% said that OCN credits helped to increase their ambitions;
- 17% said that OCN credits helped to open up new opportunities in or at work;
- 30% said that OCN credits helped to open up new opportunities outside work.

'I think it is a good idea to give these credits because if your confidence is low and therefore your direction unclear, it helps to give more meaning and incentive.'

Credit increased ambition and confidence, particularly among respondents who were black, female or over 35 years old:

- 60% of black respondents said that the credits helped a lot to build confidence as compared to 55% of white respondents;
- 62% of black respondents said that the credits helped a lot to increase ambitions as compared to 42% of white respondents;
- 58% of women said that credits helped to build confidence as compared to 49% of men;
- 50% of women said that it helped a lot to increase their ambition compared to 39% of men;
- a greater proportion of respondents over 35 years of age said that credits helped to build confidence (61%) and increase ambition (50%) compared to respondents aged 18–24 (41% in each case).

The OCN structure of progressive levels is designed to encourage progression and increase commitment to continuing learning. The responses indicate a relationship between OCN levels and motivation to progress.

5. Did learners actually progress?

The rationale of OCNs is that with confidence and ambition raised and progression opportunities available, learners who might not have otherwise done so, will seek progression. The survey indicates that far more respondents progress than originally expressed an intention to do so.

The majority of respondents progressed to a further course:

- 53% of respondents progressed on to other courses after finishing their OCN-accredited course in 1990–1;
- 22% of respondents in London and 16% in Manchester continued with the programme they had been following in 1990–1 (since the majority of OCN-accredited programmes are offered at more than one level this may demonstrate vertical progression);
- overall, 72% of respondents either progressed to another course or continued their current learning programme.

A higher proportion of black respondents progressed than white:

58% of black respondents progressed on to other courses compared with 51% of white respondents.

The higher the level of OCN credit received, the more likely respondents were to progress to courses outside the OCN framework:

From the OCN perspective, progression outside the OCN framework is seen as a measure of success. OCNs aim to act as a mechanism for articulating between different systems and sectors, providing a mechanism to enable learners to move from local, clearly targeted and less formal provision on to more obviously mainstream provision. Their emphasis is upon appropriateness of provision and enabling maximum opportunities for progression.

Forty per cent of respondents who received credits at level 1, progressed to courses accredited by OCNs, compared with 17% who started a course outside the OCN accreditation framework.

Of those respondents awarded credits at level 4, 13% progressed to OCN-accredited programmes, and 45% have started courses outside the OCN accreditation framework. This could be explained by the fact that many learners at level 4 would be expected to progress to higher education and there are greater opportunities at both levels 3 and 4 for progression to other national qualifications and awards, whereas at levels 1 and 2 there is little alternative accreditation available to that provided by OCNs.

6. Do learners progress within OCNs?

OCNs do not seek to keep learners within the OCN framework, but to enable the most suitable progression opportunities. However, the majority of OCN programmes are offered at more than one level with identified assessment criteria at each level to enable learners to work at the most appropriate level and to progress through the levels where appropriate. OCN programmes therefore offer extensive opportunities for progression.

The survey results show that nearly half of respondents were awarded OCN credits at more than one level and in Manchester more than half have credits from more than one course.

By examining the highest and lowest level of credits issued, it was possible to examine progression within the OCNs. This of course only reflects the 23% of respondents who progressed on to a programme within the OCN. Thirty per cent progressed to programmes outside the OCN and clearly are not reflected in this analysis.

Despite the fact that one of the OCNs being surveyed was only in its first full year of operation, the results indicate that:

- 44% of respondents have credits at more than one level;
- of the 198 respondents who had gained level 1 credits, 35% had progressed to level 2; 10% to level 3 and 2% to level 4;
- of the 662 respondents whose lowest level credits were level 2, 27% had progressed to level 3 and 15% to level 4;
- of the 440 respondents with credits at level 3, 58% have credits at level 4.

In addition, the Manchester database shows progression between OCN levels and sectors:

- 665 learners in Manchester had gained credits in two units, of these, 34% had increased their levels;
- of those learners who completed two units, 11% had moved from adult education (AE) to further education (FE);
- 33% of learners with credits from three different programmes had gained those in more than one sector by moving between FE, AE, voluntary and community or employer-based provision. The largest group, 19%, moved from AE to FE provision.

These findings point to the benefits to learners of a framework for progression which embraces provision funded by, and delivered in, different sectors and institutions.

7. Why did some learners not progress?

A majority of respondents at all levels progressed to other courses. Some 17%, however, did not do so. The reasons they give for this are similar to the findings of previous research on adult education: women gave family commitments; men and disabled people gave lack of an appropriate course; and black people indicated lack of money and family commitments as the main reasons.

Of the minority that did not start another course, family commitments was the most common reason given. This was particularly the case for black people and women:

The reasons given for not starting another course demonstrate very starkly the factors that affect participation:

- 30% of respondents in London and 22% in Manchester gave family commitments as the reason for not following a further course;
- 18% said there was no appropriate course;
- 21% in London and 8% in Manchester said they could not afford it at present;
- 13% in London and 20% in Manchester said they were not interested at the moment;
- 8% in London and 10% in Manchester started work;
- 20% of FE respondents gave lack of interest at the time as the reason for not progressing to another course, compared to 13% of AE respondents;
- a greater proportion of respondents from the AE sector saw family commitments as the main reason for not starting another course;
- respondents on level 3 programmes were the group least likely to find that no appropriate course was available;
- 33% of black respondents gave family commitments as the reason, compared to 24% respectively for white respondents;
- 10% of black respondents gave lack of interest as the reason for not undertaking another course, compared to 18% of white respondents;
- 30% of men said that lack of an appropriate course was the main reason for not starting another course, compared with 15% of women;
- 30% of women gave family commitments as the main reason for not progressing on to another course, compared with 12% of men;
- 30% of disabled respondents saw lack of an appropriate course as the main reason for not starting a further course, compared to 17% of able-bodied respondents.

These results, while reflecting many factors beyond the control of OCNs, nonetheless provide them with an agenda for development — for example, extending progression routes in particular areas and for particular target groups. This work is being co-ordinated through NOCN.

8. What do OCN credit holders want to do next?

Most respondents leave OCN-accredited programmes with ambitions to do further courses:

- 45% of all respondents said they would definitely do a further course;
- 29% said they thought it likely;
- 21% said they were unsure;
- 4% said they had no plans to do so.

'I was thrilled to be given a qualification for something I had started purely out of interest and for pleasure. I hope to do more courses in the future and improve my levels.'

Of those with ambitions to do further learning programmes (74% of all respondents), the two most common ambitions were to get a degree (30% in London, 24% in Manchester) and to do more learning programmes for personal interest (26% in London, 35% in Manchester). In addition, 16% want to do courses to help them get a job, and 17% want to do courses to help them get a *better* job.

'Open College Credits have given me the confidence that comes from achievement and the courage to work for a degree.'

'I would like to build up my credits by taking further courses mainly for my own pleasure and self-satisfaction, but with possibilities for a job in the future.'

Those respondents wishing to get a degree are more likely to:

- be from ethnic minority backgrounds — 44% compared to 26% of white respondents;
- be younger — 35% of respondents aged 18–24 compared with 24% of respondents aged over 35;
- be able-bodied — 32% of able-bodied respondents compared to 20% of disabled respondents;
- to have completed courses at higher OCN levels — 51% of respondents receiving level 4 credits compared to 8% of respondents receiving level 1 credits.

9. Has the experience of following the learning programme changed ambitions?

The experience of following the OCN-accredited programme appears significantly to increase the motivation and heighten the ambitions of respondents:

- 31% chose their course in order to go on to further courses;
- 53% actually progressed on to another course;
- 74% of respondents definitely intend or are likely to progress to further courses in the future;
- 53% who chose their course for personal development progressed to a further course;
- 45% of those who chose the course for personal interest also progressed;

- 8% joined their course to help them get a job; 16% now want to do courses for this reason;
- 4% joined their course to help them in their current job; 17% now want to do courses to help them get a better job.

These figures demonstrate clearly that adult learners frequently join courses and learning programmes for personal interest and social reasons, but that during the course of that experience their ambitions and expectations are raised.

Although respondents in AE are less likely to join courses in order to progress, their actual level of progression is similar to respondents in FE:

- 41% of respondents in FE joined their course to help them to go on to other courses compared to 22% in AE;
- 58% of respondents in FE actually progressed compared to 53% in AE;
- 22% of respondents in the AE sector joined their course in order to progress, but 53% did progress on to a new learning programme.

Motivation of black respondents is particularly high:

- 92% of black respondents thought that credits were important;
- 44% of black respondents chose the course in order to progress;
- 58% actually progressed;
- 54% definitely planned to do another course (compared with 43% of white respondents);
- 44% wish eventually to get a degree.

'I think it is a good thing to offer Open College Credits. It makes you think about going further because you have something to move on with — even though I did the course for personal interest.'

CONCLUSIONS

There is much which we still do not understand about the motivations and learning careers of adults. This small-scale project has, however, added to our knowledge, and demonstrates, for the first time, what learners think about OCN credits, and the extent to which they progress once involved in the framework.

In summary, the study demonstrates that:

- OCN-accredited programmes succeed in recruiting those learners who are traditionally under-represented in education and training;
- learners join courses for a range of personal, social, educational and vocational motives;
- during the course of that learning programme, their confidence is boosted, and their ambitions and expectations are raised;
- most, including many who had no original ambition to progress, go on to further learning;
- most associate credits with enhanced value, higher quality, and increased recognition by others.

While the survey results provide evidence to support the success of OCNs in achieving their aims, they also provide important monitoring information from which an agenda of development issues has been identified and is being taken forward through NOCN.

This includes proposals to improve the service offered by OCNs, for example by promoting collaborative and strategic approaches to progression, and proposals to improve their monitoring role, for example through consistent approaches to data collection. In relation to the latter, NOCN is urging its members to adopt a common approach to data collection in order that, in 1993–4, information on learner achievement, participation and progression in OCNs will be available nationally. This will provide an evolving profile of the role of the OCN credit accumulation and transfer framework.

Acknowledgement

FEU would like to thank Andrew MacIntosh, Veronica McGiveney, Gareth Parry, Keith Percy and Naomi Sargant for their time and very helpful contributions to the Unit's thinking in preparing this report.

Further information on OCNs can be obtained from Caroline Mager, Further Education Unit, Citadel Place, Tinworth Street, London SE11 5EH

Tel: 071-962 1280

Fax: 071-962 1266

Further information on FEU's work on credit frameworks is available from Caroline Mager or Tony Tait at FEU.

Information on Open College Networks can also be obtained from:

Teresa Bergin, Chair, National Open College Network, c/o Merseyside Open College Federation, Rodney House, 70 Mount Pleasant, Liverpool L3 5UX

Tel: 051-709 9099

Fax: 051-709 0172

Reproduction in whole or in part of the contents of this publication is authorised for all non-commercial educational purposes, provided the source, i.e. FEU, is acknowledged. All rights reserved with regard to commercial reproduction of the contents.

ISBN: 1 85338 296 5

Registered charity number 326347

Printed by Blackmore Press, Dorset